

Sculptor Brings Bronze to T.O.

What would it feel like to awaken from sleep to find yourself conjoined to a total stranger, a creature you've never seen before? Nassagaweya sculptor Candice Raquel Lee imagines exactly this in her work *Eve's Awakening*. The sculpture, which depicts Eve's reaction at finding herself being separated from Adam but still attached to him, is one of two of her pieces chosen for the 8th Annual Emerging Sculptors Exhibition in Toronto. Running at the Canadian Sculpture Centre (64 Merton Street) until August 18, the show features eight up-and-coming three-dimensional artists, selected from more than a hundred applicants nationwide, working in a variety of media including stone, steel, plaster, asphalt, and bronze, which is Lee's chosen medium. "I love the everlasting beauty of bronze," Lee says, "It was used by the traditional masters and the process of arriving at the final product is fascinating."

In this process, Lee first makes an original out of water-based clay which contains all the detail of the finished work. She then brings this to a bronze foundry where a silicon or rubber mould is made of the original. Melted wax is poured into the mould to make an exact duplicate. The wax is dipped in a heat-resistant ceramic slurry and is ultimately melted out leaving a negative imprint in the hardened shell. Molten bronze is poured into the shell at temperatures exceeding 1100 degrees Celsius. When the bronze cools, it undergoes sandblasting, welding, and polishing before Lee chooses its final colour patina, achieved through chemical alteration of the surface. Thus, the bronze cast becomes a communal effort involving numerous skilled artisans, each seeking to realize the sculptor's intention.

In the case of *Eve's Awakening*, the foundry was put to the test and succeeded. Because of the closely attached nature of the figures, the mould had to be made in several pieces and the final sculpture needed to be welded together. The piece also could not be made completely hollow because of the way Adam and Eve are positioned, and eighty-nine pounds of bronze were finally required to make the sculpture, which is just over three feet long. Though her work may be difficult to carry to shows and photographic sessions, the

nature of the metal enabled Lee to achieve a patina reflecting the idea of balance between the sexes that appears frequently in her art. Adam is primarily a deep brown colour but features highlights of the golden brown that colours Eve's body while she in turn contains highlights of his dark brown. Thus, the two become mirror images of one another; "like yin and yang," Lee adds.

This notion of harmony between male and female is also apparent in the second of Lee's sculptures at the show, *What Abimelech Saw*. The piece is reminiscent of *The Kiss* by Rodin in its depiction of an embracing couple, but Lee sees it as a more feminist statement. The work represents the biblical couple Isaac and Rebecca caught in an intimate moment from the Old Testament and focuses on their egalitarian relationship through body language: neither is more or less active than the other and Isaac supports Rebecca's weight while she supports his. Having studied ancient cultures like Crete in which men and women enjoyed social equality, Lee sees this as a model for social change. "Many of the problems in our society—violence and abuse, environmental destruction, prejudice toward those who are different—originate in a history of male domination that we are just starting to abandon," she asserts. "I hope that by promoting absolute equality between the sexes, my art can be a small step toward bringing about a better world."

Lee was first inspired to make *What Abimelech Saw* by the particular feminine strength of Rebecca in the Bible. She sees Isaac first and desires him; later, she climbs a mountain alone to speak to God when her pregnancy becomes difficult. Lee was also motivated by the chance to present the figures of mythology and religion in different ways that aren't usually seen in art. She describes herself as a "voracious reader" of myths, folklore, fairy tales, and other literary works since childhood, which explains the strong narrative element in her sculpture. "It isn't enough for me just to show a pose or make something beautiful," Lee says emphatically, "My work has to say something, to freeze a moment that reveals the essence of a story."

Still, Lee was not always able to express her literary imagination in clay. Since her mother wanted her to become a doctor and didn't see art as a suitable career, Lee often sculpted in secret through her childhood and teenage years, hiding all signs of her labour before her mother returned home from work. She recalls: "I used to sit on the floor and sculpt on the open door of an oven since I didn't have a table, and I only made very small pieces that I could hide. When five o' clock came around, it was time to clean up any signs of clay." As an adult, she only found the time to make a few pieces over the years for herself and later as gifts for her husband. With his encouragement and after emigrating to Canada, Lee ultimately decided to pursue her dream. "*What Abilemech Saw* was originally a birthday present for my hubby and he urged me to have it made into bronze for the world to see even if it meant the original would be destroyed," she says. She also credits the serenity of living in the North Halton countryside with her ability to produce ten bronzes and twenty sculptures overall in the past year: "I love being able to see the Escarpment and being able to look out of my studio and be surrounded by wildflowers and butterflies. The peacefulness is very conducive to creativity which may be why this area is a hotbed of artists."

Having found her true calling, Candice Raquel Lee has not looked back. Besides the current show at the Canadian Sculpture Centre, she has already shown in Georgetown and at two other Toronto galleries this year, not bad for someone who first turned pro in April. And, next year, she is already lined up to exhibit at the Toronto Art Expo, Canada's largest art event, and has received her first solo show at the Cambridge Centre for the Arts. "It's been a really exciting first year out," Lee says with a smile, "I can't wait to see what the future brings."